



PRESS RELEASE

Embassy of the United States of America in Damascus

Tel: 963-11-3391-4444 Fax: 963-11-332-1456 Web: <http://damascus.usembassy.gov/>

Congressman Adam Smith's Statement at the Airport upon departure

January 31, 2009

I am Adam Smith, Congressman from the state of Washington. We are here with a bipartisan delegation. I just want to say that we had an excellent meeting with President Asad. He was very open, very frank and honest, listened to us and answered our questions. We feel that it was an excellent beginning.

We are very optimistic in the United States with our newly elected President, President Obama, that we have an opportunity for a fresh start in our relationship with Syria. We are mindful of the fact that there are many, many difficult and sensitive issues to get past. We believe that the process has to begin, and we have to take that start fresh approach because these problems are so important. We also believe that we have common interests. We all want peace in this region, and we all want to successfully fight terrorism.

So, we are hoping that those common interests can help lead to more dialogue. We view today's meeting as an excellent beginning.

And I just want to conclude by saying that we are very impressed with the Syrian people__ their culture, their hospitality. We had an excellent visit. We were very well treated and I think I speak for the entire delegation when I say we are looking forward to coming back. Thank you.

Question: (from AP) When will we see a new ambassador in Damascus, and how do you evaluate the situation in the Middle East?

Rep. Smith: Well, we hope that we can build towards that. There are a lot of steps in the relationship, a lot of peaces to it, a lot of things we need to fix. We need a new embassy here, to begin with. We are hopeful that those steps can lead to the point of future conversation and future discussions. And as far as the Middle East is concerned, I think that sending Senator Mitchell to the region by President Obama as one of acts shows how seriously he takes the situation and shows how he is going to be engaged in trying to move forward the peace process.

Representative Smith was accompanied by the following representatives:

Representative Gabrielle Giffords (Democrat-Arizona)

Representative Ted Poe (Republican-Texas)

Representative Glenn Nye (Democrat-Virginia)

Representative Frank Kratovil (Democrat-Maryland)

Representative Susan Davis (Democrat-California)

Representative C.A. Ruppersberger (Democrat-Maryland)